

ESTHER FERRER

Poems

15.09.22 > 5.11.22

Opening: Thursday, September 15th, 6 PM.

Location: Àngels barcelona, C. Pintor Fortuny, 27.

September 15th, 6 PM.

Esther Ferrer and Claudia Segura* in conversation

Location: Espai 2, àngels barcelona. C. Dels àngels 16.

Limited capacity: For bookings: info@angelsbarcelona.com

* Claudia Segura is a curator of exhibitions and collection of the MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.



"Prime numbers have rhythm. An internal rhythm that is never symmetrical, but asymmetrical, like the rhythm of the universe. The universe expands, and similarly so do the prime numbers, the further one advances in the series, the greater the distance between them is." Esther Ferrer, Paris, 2022.

At a time when it is becoming increasingly evident that mathematics and algorithms control many aspects of our lives, Esther Ferrer's work on prime numbers takes on new meanings.

The common thread of the artist's work is performance, but her interest in space, time and rhythm takes another form in the meticulous and mental work she has been doing with prime numbers since the 1970s. Through different visual systems she invents, the artist generates constellations that unfold on wood, paper or canvas, revealing a possible internal rhythm of the prime numbers, a geometric harmony. An exercise in which Esther seems to ally herself with numbers to give form to chance, to chaos and to leave open new questions about the contemporary world.

This exhibition invites us to approach a selection of works from her series *Poema de los números primos*, exploring the poetry and rhythm of these numbers.

BIO | Esther Ferrer (San Sebastián, 1937) is a pioneer performance and multidisciplinary artist. She develops her artistic practice through actions, photographs, installations, models, intervened objects and even sound pieces. Her work can be understood through the minimalist and conceptual currents initiated in the 1960s for which authors such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Georges Perec or Fluxus are key references. Equally important for her are the historical feminist movements. In 1967, she began to participate in the activities of ZAJ group (along with Walter Marchetti, Ramon Barce and Juan Hidalgo), until its dissolution in 1996, a period in which she came into contact with artists such as John Cage.

Setting her own body as the point of departure, Esther Ferrer explores notions such as space, time, infinity and chance — a situated questioning that transfers into her plastic work. Repetition, rhythm, rigor and poetry are very present in series such as *El libro del sexo*, *El libro de las cabezas*, and *El Poema de los números primos*. Her sense of humor and the issue of gender are both a constant in the artist's language.

Parallel to her artistic practice, it is worth mentioning her important theoretical work, developed both in her journalistic collaboration with various publications, as well as in courses and workshops given at European and American universities.

Throughout her extensive career, Esther Ferrer has participated in numerous action art festivals, and has exhibited her work in different museums, both in Spain and abroad. She has also received several awards: in 1999 she represented Spain at the Venice Biennale; in 2008 she was awarded the National Prize of Plastic Arts; in 2012 with the Gure Artea Prize of the Basque Government, and in 2014 with the Velázquez Prize of Plastic Arts (Spain). She has also received the MAV (Women in the Visual Arts) Award (Spain), and the Marie Claire de l'Art Contemporain Award (France).

Among her individual exhibitions 'All variations are valid, including this one' at the National Museum Art Centre Reina Sofia of Madrid (2017), 'Intertwined Spaces' At the Guggenheim Bilbao (2017), her individual exhibition at the National Centre of Dance of Paris (2018) and 'Face B. Image Auto-portrait' at the MAC/VAL (Musée d'Art contemporain du Val-de-Marne) (2014) stand out. At the end of 2022 she will present an individual exhibition in the city of Frankfurt. Her work can be found in the main institutional collections of Spain, like the Reina Sofia Museum, MACBA, IVAM, Pompidou and the National collection of Plastic Arts of France, among others.

Poemas

Text by Carolina Jimenez, September 2022

Esther Ferrer (San Sebastián, 1937) often says she started working with prime numbers after having a dream where she swam in a sea of numbers. When waking up, every number she could recall was a prime number. That dream took place in the late 1970s. Since then, the artist has not stopped working with, through and towards them. However, in the dialogue that we maintain on the occasion of the present exhibition, we do not dwell so much on their origin as on their course. Because transcending that principle, prime numbers constitute another principle with a more diffuse temporality: a creative and formative drive in her work and life that has radically attracted, moved and fascinated her for decades, transcending results and evidence, to mobilise a continuous time which happens between measured time. It is about this in-between that I ask her when we talk. About the traceability of the rhythm in which the prime numbers participate. That is where its poetic and technological dimensions unfold. Right there, where another reality of work and life is conjugated, where time is not stipulated under capitalist parameters. Exactly there, where another time is possible and, above all, feasible. "Prime numbers have a rhythm that is never symmetrical, but asymmetrical, like the rhythm of the universe. The universe expands, and so do the prime numbers," she tells me.

The exhibition *Poemas* presents a collection of coded gestures, a meticulous choreography of recognisable and legible compositional structures: a sort of musical score or source code written in different programming languages, at times interpretable, replicable, and versionable. It is an expanded mode of writing that reveals a large part of the physical and material heritage which makes it possible and sustains it, to the point of widening the contours and environments that usually separate performativity and object. The successive pieces extend in a smooth space-time, inhabiting the impasses between potency and expectation, where continuity is succeeded by the discontinuity that constitutes it. The full and the empty, the said and the supposed, turn out to be interchangeable in Esther Ferrer's work.

"It is neither the paper, nor the canvas, nor the nail, nor the thread, it is something else"¹, said Esther Ferrer not so long ago about her work with prime numbers. Something else that could imply the assumption that not everything that is there is seen, and that not everything that is seen is there. Something else that would institute itself as a refractory but adaptable method to suspend the Oedipal narration of the relations of contingency and provisionality, crossing the divisions between thinking and doing, between practice and theory, between life and art. Something else that would sustain the supposed paradox of something like a "body without organs" as understood by Antonin Artaud, and which, to say it with Gilles Deleuze², would mobilise a "sensation" with a deeper potency. Not that of an anatomical body, but that of an atomic body that is actioned, activated and re-created. Something else that would activate a more labyrinthine and intricate

¹ Esther Ferrer in the catalog of *Todas las variaciones son válidas, incluida esta*. Conversación entre Esther Ferrer, Laurence Rassel y Mar Villaspesa. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2017.

² "No mouth. No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No oesophagus. No stomach. No belly. No anus." Antonin Artaud quoted by Gilles Deleuze in *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation*, 2002.

habit —and habitus— that apprehends the rhizomatic possibilities of the structures of presence and absence, of forgetting and memory, of knowledge and unknowing.

Avoiding a chronological organisation —it could not be otherwise— the exhibition is articulated around a different order, overcoming the dichotomy of two not necessarily divergent forms: that of a linear time and that of a circular time. The journey it proposes, as meticulous as it is open-ended, is interrupted by the whims, innovations and unknowns of prime numbers. Their confines and their overflows of meaning accompany the distances between the different stages, facets and variations of the genealogy, to the point where we can trace our own itineraries through them. An artistic genealogy that is by no means solely artistic, much less mathematical. Esther Ferrer's prime numbers undo simple binary oppositions and function on the inherent relational level between disciplines by bringing the complex ramifications of these structures and systems into play and circulation. It is a renunciation of control over the work of art itself in favour of the indeterminate, the random, the indiscriminate, and the unexpected.

Or to put it another way, it is the waiting for the encounter with the conditions of possibility for the conception, the notation, the layout, and the realisation of each structure that balances the work between the point of control and non-control. The prime numbers once again make clear that there is no answer or solution to the dead-end street that is the question of what art is. Prime numbers are exactly what they are, no more and no less. Or to quote Hannah Arendt: "The proposal, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think about what we are doing"³. Let us begin by telling what we are doing.

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958.